



# Roles and responsibilities

## Role of the parish priest and canonical administrators

The parish priest<sup>1</sup> is entrusted by the Archbishop with the canonical responsibility of the parish to which he has been appointed (Can. 515 §1 as cited in Coriden, Green & Heintschel 1985). He exercises pastoral care of the community by gathering the faithful together in the person of Jesus Christ through proclamation of the Word and celebration of the Eucharist and sacraments, and through the life of the local Church in its pastoral care and outreach to those most in need or on the margins. Through his mentoring and formative roles, the parish priest has a central role in the life of the school.

With respect to canon law and the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, the parish priest has defined rights and responsibilities in the life of the parish and the diocese, and is appointed as the pastor of the People of God in a defined location. This is the pastoral context in which Catholic primary schools operate and by virtue of which the parish priest has a duty to serve school communities within that parish or association of parishes.

The canonical responsibilities and authority of the priest for the religious life of the school remain unchanged in the new governance arrangements, even as his duties in areas such as governance, administration and employment are transferred to MACS. In fact, one of the goals of the governance transfer is that the priest is freed from administrative responsibility to be more available to the school for the formation of staff and other forms of pastoral ministry critical to the school's capacity to realise its mission.

1. References to parish priest also include any priest assigned responsibilities such as an administrator.

An essential role of the priest is his sacramental ministry, which is largely demonstrated by bringing together and growing the parish community, inclusive of the school community. Therefore, he must have a central role in the life of the school, be it a primary school located in his parish or a regional secondary college under the care of an association of surrounding parishes. The presence of the priest in the life of a school is welcome, normative and essential.

The leadership and support of the parish priest is necessary to ensure the school is faithful to its distinctive Catholic mission and identity. As the Eucharist is the source and summit of Catholic faith, the priest plays a critical role in fostering the school's religious identity through his leadership of the liturgical and sacramental life of the school. In a parish primary school, the celebration of the sacraments of initiation and reconciliation provides a particular point of focus for the parish priest along with class Masses, visits to Religious Education classes, the formation of staff and other forms of pastoral outreach.

Each school community presents a unique context for ministry, and the relationship between the priest and the principal and key leaders in the school provides a foundation for discerning how best to respond to the pastoral needs of the students, their families and the staff in the school. The parish priest is easily accessible to the school community to have regular contact with the principal, leadership team, staff and students. The parish school only realises its Catholic mission when it is connected organically and vitally with the parish of which it is a part. The parish priest therefore has a critical role to play in the life of the school, representing the parish community as the custodian of mission. It is crucial that each parish priest and principal work closely together to ensure that the school remains connected to its parish and is an authentic expression of the mission of the local Church.

The principal will always keep the parish priest appropriately informed of key elements of the life of the school community. Regular meetings between the parish priest, the principal and the school's leadership team will build relationships that enable all leaders to enrich the life and mission of their school.

The parish priest participates in the principal selection process through membership of the selection panel,

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and should be part of the selection panel for the deputy principal and the Religious Education leader. The parish priest is an ex officio member of the school advisory council for parish primary schools in his parish, and ensures that the school advisory council supports the principal and the mission of the parish. Parish priests also play a critical role on school advisory councils as they continue to represent their parish as the beneficial owner of the school's land and buildings. Parish priests must therefore approve any initiative that materially affects the school's land and buildings or other areas of parish property.

It is critical that the parish priest and principal work closely together and that regular, calendared opportunities are scheduled for both to meet and attend to the school's mission and religious identity. The parish priest has a critical role to play in the formation of staff in the school and this formative role can be supported by programs and services offered by MACS and other Catholic agencies.

### Association of canonical administrators

The size and complexity of secondary schools generally mean that it is not possible for any parish working alone to establish a secondary college or provide the number of students necessary for it to function effectively. Over time, and as the need arose in growth areas of the Archdiocese, parishes in particular regions joined together to form associations to establish secondary colleges. Each regional college is owned by a canonical association comprising

the parish priests of the member parishes of the association. These parish priests collectively are the canonical administrators who own the regional colleges and, as is the case with the parish primary school, the canonical administrators in each association have a duty to serve their college community by providing pastoral outreach to its families and students. The pastoral outreach exercised by canonical administrators has a different focus and shape given the age of the students and the nature of secondary education. The canonical administrators work together collaboratively with the principal as custodians of the college's mission and Catholic identity. Canonical administrators play a key role in the school's liturgies and year-level retreats, staff faith formation programs, family outreach and other forms of pastoral ministry.

As is the case in parish primary schools, canonical administrators of a secondary school are welcomed into the life of the school by the principal and kept appropriately informed of matters in the life of the school. Regular meetings of the association of canonical administrators with the principal and the college leadership team enable relationships to be built that provide a foundation for the college's Catholic life and mission.

The president of the association of canonical administrators has a coordinating role and provides a primary point of contact and support for the principal. The president ensures that meetings occur with and among the association's members, thus enabling them to contribute effectively to the advancement of the school's Catholic mission and life. The president works with the principal to identify opportunities for the involvement of association members in the life of the college, including membership of the senior leadership selection panels, inclusion in school reviews, membership of the school advisory council and participation in the principal's professional review.

As is the case with the parish primary school, ownership of the regional college's land and buildings does not transfer to MACS when the governance transition takes place. Beneficial ownership of the college's land and buildings remains with the association of canonical administrators as the representatives of the parishes that are associated with each regional college. While the president represents his fellow priests in signing off on capital works, he needs to ensure that all members of the association support any initiative that materially affects the college's land and buildings or its Catholic mission.

#### Key responsibilities:

- Priest and principal work together to ensure that the means by which we enter into the mystery of Christ (the Sacred Scriptures, the sacraments, liturgy and prayer, doctrinal teaching, and the witness of the saints and the Christian community) are given a significant profile for students and parents enrolled in the Catholic school.
- As spiritual guide and mentor in the parish, which includes the school community, the priest is responsible for cultivating a supportive and pastoral relationship with the principal and leadership team of the school.
- The priest is the beneficial owner of the parish and school land and buildings, and the patrimony and good name of the parish ultimately sit within his responsibility. Consideration of use of school space outside normal Catholic education purposes requires agreement between principal and priest. Agreement will need to be reached with the parish for any proposals for a school to make use of parish space. The same is true for the association of canonical administrators.
- The priest participates in the selection panel for appointment of principal in both primary and secondary schools. In primary schools, the priest is also part of the deputy principal and Religious Education leader panels, and may be for secondary schools. He can participate in other selection processes for leaders of a school by common agreement with a principal and, in all cases, consensus for appointments is the objective.
- In both primary and secondary schools, the principal is responsible for the thoughtful nurturing of faith among teachers and students, and brings to the parish priest/canonical administrator decisions of significance to the life of faith in that community, including questions concerning reputation and the general good of the broader parish family.

## Role of the principal

The principal is a leader mandated by MACS to model a form of Christian servanthood that maintain the bonds of communion between the school and the wider parish, diocese and the universal Catholic Church. This is a great task for which ongoing formation, support and encouragement are required. Catholic doctrine informs and animates these expressions of unity and pastoral care, and provides the means of giving shape to authentic witness to the whole school community. These are organic relationships built up and made stronger by a responsible attentiveness to the life of faith, hope and charity.

As leader of the school, the principal works most closely with the parish priest to lead the religious mission in the school community. The principal exercises this leadership under the authority of the bishop of the diocese in taking responsibility for the provision of religious instruction by means of a Religious Education program, and for the maintenance of acceptable standards of Religious Education in accordance with the policies and guidelines of diocesan authorities. Ongoing formation of principals is critical for their leadership to be effective, particularly as the cultural context becomes more secularised and pluralised.

Ongoing formation of staff is also the responsibility of the principal who works collaboratively with the priest in providing opportunities for personal, professional and faith formation. In the provision of formative opportunities, particularly in faith formation, MACS will offer support to school leadership as the board

is committed to enhancing the mission and religious identity of the schools under its care. Of particular interest to principals, Religious Education leaders and other senior members of staff is the opportunity to undertake spiritual direction as a means of deepening one's individual spiritual life.

Key responsibilities of the principal's role include development of the faith community, particular focus on the safety and wellbeing of students, formulation of a vision for the whole school, attention to contemporary teaching and learning in order to engage all students, and stewardship of the people and resources with particular outreach to the parent community.

In particular, the principal is committed to shaping a school community in which teachers are valued as the immediate witnesses in the learning environment. Principals are cognisant of the cultural environment in which a Catholic school works and the irreplaceable role of the teachers with whom they collaborate.

As Pope Paul VI observed:

Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses (1975, n. 41).

The principal works with the leaders and representatives of the local Church, collaborating with staff and members of the school community to achieve the mission of the school. All responsibilities of the principal are executed within a framework of ministry that is inspired by the values and vision of the gospel which seeks to enhance the Catholic identity of the school at all times.

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The principal has a special responsibility to strike a balance between the commitments of solidarity and subsidiarity, which are linked together in every local community (Benedict XVI 2009, n. 58). Because the principal leads a school that sits within a broader parish context, goodwill and charity will be disposed to the parish priest and parish community. In a governance model that respects canon law and the principle of subsidiarity, the authority, rights and responsibilities of parish priests are recognised, as are the leadership and management that must be exercised at the local level by principals and staff in schools.

This principal recognises that the tensions arising in every school between solidarity and subsidiarity are resolved through quality relationships and communications.

The principal is responsible for creating opportunities for canonical administrators from the association of parishes to be involved in the faith life of the secondary school, and encourages the priests from the respective parishes to make ongoing contact with the students represented in the school from their particular parish.

#### Key responsibilities:

- By the appointment as principal in a Catholic school, the principal is charged with the duty to build up the school according to the Statement of Mission and the MACS constitution.
- A principal is entrusted by the local Church (the diocese) with a leadership role in modelling and teaching the Catholic faith, encouraging the living out of that faith in the school community, as well as exercising special responsibility under the authority of the bishop for the religious instruction in the school.
- While entrusted with distinct roles of administrative, managerial, educational, compliance and statutory leadership, the principal collaborates closely with the parish priest in the enhancement of the Catholic identity and mission of the school.
- The principal has responsibility for the school's faith community and vision, safety and wellbeing of the students, teaching and learning, people and resources, and community outreach.



## Relationship between parish, association of parishes, priest and principal

The Catholic school is an expression of the essential evangelising mission of the parish and it is vital that schools develop and maintain fruitful relationships within the local parish/es. Here it is important to note that Catholic schools cannot be Catholic on their own and, in fact, can only be Catholic when they are in communion with the wider Church and its mission.

To be in communion is to be in a deep relationship and the relationships take many forms. For the parish primary school, the relationship with the wider parish plays a central and crucial role in its Catholic mission and identity. Similarly for the Catholic regional college, the relationship with the parishes in the association that founded the college is critical for its mission and identity. Finally, a diocesan college is founded by the Archdiocese (rather than an association of parishes), but the relationships with the wider Church and the parishes of their students are just as critical when it comes to the college's Catholic mission and identity.

The relationship between mission and identity is expressed very well by Pope John Paul II in *Christifideles Laici*: 'Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other to the point that communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion' (1988, n. 32).

The school recognises the considerable contribution the parish, and parish families, makes to the school and for the Catholic education of its students. The school therefore plays a key role in parish community life and cannot be thought of in isolation from parish (or parishes in the situation where a school, whether primary or secondary, services more than one parish).

Catholic schools exist because they are Catholic in their mission and identity. The vitality of the mission of the Catholic school is enlivened when the school is embedded in the life of the local parish through the fostering of close and life-giving relationships with families and parishes.

Catholic education is a key ministry of the parish, and the parish priest is the key messenger in the evangelisation and education in faith within the parish. Therefore his leadership and support are necessary to ensure the school is faithful to its distinctive Catholic identity and spirituality.

Likewise the priests recognise the important ministry they have as key educators in faith in Catholic secondary schools as they represent the association of parishes to which the school belongs.

It is therefore critical that the priest and principal foster a strong collaborative relationship and that

regular, calendared opportunities are scheduled for both to meet and an agreed record of the discussions maintained. Formal and informal meetings are necessary as a means for planning and review. Opportunities for priest and principal to engage together with other members of the parishes and school also assist in developing good relationships between them.

In any situations of dispute or a divergence of directions between parish and school, which cannot be handled satisfactorily locally, resolution will be managed by collaboration between MACS and the Archdiocese.

### Key responsibilities:

- Priest and principal are the key leaders for the vitality of the mission of a Catholic school and together share in responsibility for that school community; significant questions of faith, formation and strategic direction must be handled in partnership.
- Investment of time and resources in life-giving relationships between priest, principal and families breathes life into the Catholic school community, requiring of priests and principals that common risks and challenges are brought to one another's attention and resolved collaboratively.
- The priest is a leader and a participant in the school community, and the principal has a responsibility to facilitate a priest's presence and evangelising role within the life of the school.
- A priest and principal must meet frequently to discuss significant matters within parish and school. How this partnership is conducted can be worked out locally, but MACS and the Archdiocese share in a responsibility to cultivate an environment of support and encouragement.
- Dispute resolutions will be managed by collaboration between MACS and the Archdiocese.

## Role of the school advisory council

School advisory councils do not share in the governance of Catholic schools, but provide a crucial point of connection between the wider school community and school leaders. While they do not have a decision-making authority, they inform and advise the principal and school leadership.

While the MACS board has fiduciary responsibility for strategic direction and oversight of the management of MACS' operations, a range of powers and functions are delegated to the executive director who in turn determines the appropriate operating model within the company for the delegation to be exercised. Clear lines of authority, reporting and delegation have been established which assign the operational management of the school to the principal and particular advisory responsibilities to the school advisory council. While these responsibilities are outlined in the school advisory council terms of reference, it is important council members understand their role is to give consideration to, and advice on, important school matters in order to support the principal and the strategic interest of the school. The following are some examples of ways the School Advisory Council may support the school and the principal:

- articulating and enacting the school's vision and mission
- promoting the school's Catholic ethos and culture
- promoting faith formation and development
- supporting school policies as required
- giving advice to the principal on issues such as school improvement plans and enrolment trends
- engaging in discussion with the principal about the annual school budget and other financial matters
- giving advice to the principal about the school master plan
- providing capital resource planning and maintenance support to the principal.

As an advisory body, the school advisory council develops processes of consultation that are an important expression of the educational relationship that exists between parents, schools, parishes and the wider parish community to support all students in the enhancement of their outcomes.

In a one-school one-parish situation, there may be a single school advisory council but, in a situation where one parish has multiple schools, then one school advisory council covering all schools may be advisable. Principals and priests have the flexibility to adapt the school advisory council terms of reference to their school's own particular needs.

MACS provides ongoing support to school advisory councils such as policy guidance and templates for their work, but is not responsible for their activities, utilising principles of subsidiarity and solidarity.

### Key responsibilities:

- School advisory councils are an important vehicle for consultation between parish, school and parents.
- They do not share in governance responsibilities, but act as a connection point between the wider school community and school leaders.
- They are an important point of liaison with parish pastoral councils.
- Through this forum, parent representatives share their wisdom with, and offer support to, principals and the strategic interests of the school according to their terms of reference.
- Priests have an important ex officio role to play on these advisory councils, but can adjust their participation according to local need and circumstance, such as the number of schools in the parish, and would normally attend meetings.
- Priests and principals are ex officio members.
- Terms of office on the school advisory council are determined by the council's terms of reference.

## Role of parents in the Catholic school

Catholic schools view parents as having a valued role in the education of the students in partnership with educators. It is the privilege of a school to educate the students of families who choose a Catholic school. The Catholic Church defines parents as the first and most important educators of their children. Since the Second Vatican Council, this has been a constant focus of Catholic educators in the life of the Church:

The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1999, n. 2221).

In a Catholic school, parents are invited to engage in their children's learning and in their school community. Parents can be engaged in schools in a variety of ways, but of utmost importance is that parents know they are supported in the academic, spiritual, moral and emotional guidance they give to their children. Therefore it is vital that priests and principals encourage parents to have a sense of community and belonging with parish and school, and to become engaged in whatever ways possible.

The school advisory council is one means of engagement with parents that enables a fruitful participation in consultation on matters affecting the education of students.

Parents have a particularly important part to play in the educating community, since it is to them that primary and natural responsibility for their children's education belongs (Congregation for Catholic Education 1997, n. 20).

Catholic school communities build relationships between parish and school, between school and home, between parent, teacher and student, between learning and living, focused on formation, learning and wellbeing outcomes for all children (CEM 2020, p. 10).



There must be the closest cooperation between parents and the teachers to whom they entrust their children to be educated. In fulfilling this task, teachers are to collaborate closely with the parents and willingly listen to them; associations and meetings with parents are to be set up and held in high esteem (Can. 796 §2 as cited in Coriden, Green & Heintschel 1985).

### Key responsibilities:

- Parents are the first and most important educators of their children, and all leaders in a Catholic school play a crucial role in supporting that vocation by engaging parents in their children's learning.
- Priests and principals work together to evangelise the students in their care, encouraging parent engagement in the parish and school community.
- School advisory councils have their own local history and identity, and are an important way in which a healthy and mutually informed participation is cultivated between parish, school and parents.